BUSINESS PLAN 2017–20
Children's Services

ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

This business plan was prepared under my direction, taking into consideration the government's policy decisions as of March 3, 2017.

original signed by

Danielle Marie Larivee, Minister

MINISTRY OVERVIEW

The ministry consists of the Department of Children's Services. Within the department's budget, funding is provided for a range of programs and services with a focus on and accountability for protecting children through child intervention, foster and kinship care, adoption, child care, early childhood development and improvements for children and youth.

A more detailed description of Children's Services and its programs and initiatives can be found at: www.childrensservices.alberta.ca.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The outcomes and key strategies identified in this business plan are aligned with the strategic direction of the Government of Alberta.

Children's Services delivers supports and services to children, youth and families. The ministry was established to create an increased focus on ensuring that children in Alberta are provided with the services and supports they need to thrive in healthy families and healthy communities. As outlined below, this work is complex and influenced by a diverse population, economic factors, relationships with ministry partners and a context of intergenerational trauma. Children's Services is working to transform the way it supports children and families through strengthening partnerships with Indigenous leaders and communities, the Government of Canada, other Government of Alberta ministries, community-based agencies and other stakeholders.

Diverse Families

Families in Alberta are becoming more diverse. This is due to a variety of factors including migration and immigration, urbanization and changing family structures. Families from across Canada and around the world continue to settle in Alberta. Recent Census data (2016) show that the province continues to urbanize with 83.6 per cent of Albertans living in urban settings with increasing numbers of lone parent families, blended and other family structures.

In 2016, the population grew to over 4.2 million people and there were an estimated 333,253 children between the ages of zero to five in Alberta. Women in Alberta continue to have primary responsibility for caring for children and other dependant family members and their participation in the labour market is affected by caregiving responsibilities. Supporting families with children and providing accessible, high-quality and affordable childcare throughout the province is a priority for the ministry. The ministry is aware of the diversity of families and the need to deliver services such as early childhood development and child protection in a culturally appropriate manner.

Families and the Economy

The historic collapse in global oil prices has had a significant impact on Albertans, with significant losses in employment and falling earnings. However, the impact of the oil price shock on the Alberta economy appears to be subsiding as a multitude of economic indicators are showing signs of stabilization (or are in the early stages of recovery). However, even as an economic recovery begins to take shape, household incomes will likely remain below pre-downturn levels.

For Alberta's families, while employment is showing signs of improvement, the unemployment rate is expected to remain elevated. As the economy continues to adjust, economic factors will continue to have an important impact on families, and may impact the quality of life for children whose parents are struggling to maintain income or employment. Children are far more likely than Albertans in general to live in a low-income family (15.5 per cent of children 0 to 17 years-old compared to 10.8 per cent of all Albertans in 2014). This trend has persisted over time. Children who experience poverty are more likely to have poorer cognitive, behavioural, social and emotional outcomes compared to children not living in poverty. Children from families that are Indigenous, recent immigrants, ethnic minorities, affected by disability or led by a female lone parent are also more likely to be impacted by poverty.

Families who experience poverty are more likely to struggle with providing all the supports that children need. Broader policy choices, including the Alberta Child Benefit, enhanced Family Employment Tax Credit, increases to the minimum wage, increases to Family and Community Support Services, additional investments into child care and carbon levy rebates all provide additional supports to families that may be vulnerable to poverty.

Early Childhood Development

Advances in neuroscience have increased our understanding of the ways in which early childhood experiences shape the developing brain, impact child development, and also affect well-being and success in later life. The developing brain is highly elastic and grows rapidly between the ages of zero to five years. Many aspects of children's environments have an effect on their development, including learning activities in the home and family income and related access to economic and social resources. Other environments, including high-quality, vibrant early learning environments such as child care, have also been shown to positively impact children's learning and educational achievement in the long term.

Relationships and Partnerships

Delivering quality programs and services to children and families requires collaboration and fostering relationships with other governments, Indigenous leaders and communities, the non-profit and voluntary sector and other community partners. In Alberta, the non-profit and voluntary sector plays a significant role in the delivery of social services to children, youth and families.

Intergenerational Trauma

Canada and Alberta are in the midst of redefining, reconciling and healing the historical relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action call upon all orders of government to work together to change policies and programs in a concerted effort to repair the harm caused by residential schools and move forward with reconciliation.

Intergenerational trauma exists in many families because survivors have not had an opportunity to address the abuse they experienced. These experiences can be transmitted to later generations. Intergenerational trauma has impacted the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples and has led to greater social disparity. Continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples may further perpetuate the effects of intergenerational trauma.

The Government of Alberta is committed to working toward reconciliation and to achieving better social outcomes for children and families, including Indigenous people, through coordinated and collaborative service delivery and by addressing the root causes of social and economic challenges. These services are delivered on the premise that every Albertan has the strengths and potential to succeed.

OUTCOMES, KEY STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Outcome One: Families are supported to provide a safe and healthy environment for children and youth

Families of all backgrounds work better in healthy, supportive communities that include quality schools, strong primary health care services, community organizations and government services. The ministry recognizes the importance of providing supports for children from their early years through their transition into adulthood in order to develop competencies and coping skills that affect learning, behaviour and health. The ministry also works to provide parents with quality information, supports and services to strengthen family resilience.

Key Strategies:

1.1 Improve access to quality, affordable child care.

1.2 Enhance and promote community based early childhood services, parenting resources and supports.

1.3 Partner with Alberta Health to improve the addictions and mental health system, paying specific attention to children and youth.

1.4 Develop and implement the Children's Services Addiction and Mental Health Framework.

1.5 Promote and enhance youth mentoring supports and services.

Performance Measures	Last Actual 2015-16	Target 2017-18	Target 2018-19	Target 2019-20
1.a Percentage of licensed child care programs compliant with the *Child Care Licensing Act* and *Child Care Licensing Regulation*	70%	72%	73%	74%
1.b Percentage of youth receiving Advancing Futures Bursaries who successfully completed their planned studies during the fiscal year	84%	86%	87%	88%

Linking Performance Measures to Outcomes:

1.a Demonstrates the ministry's commitment to providing safe, high-quality learning environments for children to provide the foundation for achieving better social and economic outcomes over the long-term.

1.b Demonstrates how well Children's Services is addressing the needs of youth transitioning out of government care into post-secondary and enabling them to reach their full potential through participation in advanced education.

Outcome Two: Children and youth in need of child intervention are supported in order to achieve safety and well-being

Every child deserves to grow up in a home where they are safe and nurtured. The ministry supports preservation of families by offering targeted services and community-based supports so children can safely remain at home. The ministry intervenes to protect children and youth when necessary, seeking to provide them with a safe and nurturing environment that is free from abuse and neglect and that encourages the development of lifelong relationships. The ministry works collaboratively with parents and extended family to maintain familial, cultural and community connections and pursue reunification of children with their parents. The ministry continues to build on preventive approaches and implementation of reforms in the child intervention system, focusing on keeping families together, addressing the conditions that bring children into care and promoting collaborative solutions to support child safety and well-being.

Key Strategies:

2.1 Continue to improve child intervention practice through the implementation of the Child Intervention Practice Framework and the Signs of Safety practice approach.

2.2 Implement the Prevention and Early Intervention Framework to prevent child maltreatment.

2.3 Respond to and implement recommendations from external reviews to improve and strengthen the child intervention system.

2.4 Support children in care to develop long-term, nurturing relationships.

Performance Measure	Last Actual 2015-16	Target 2017-18	Target 2018-19	Target 2019-20
2.a Percentage of children and youth with a new child intervention file who did not have a file closure in the previous 12 months[1]	85%	87%	87%	87%

Note:

[1] Includes children and youth that are in care and not in care.

Linking Performance Measures to Outcomes:

2.a Demonstrates the number of children and youth who have received child intervention services that do not return for additional services and demonstrates how well the ministry is doing to provide permanent and stable living situations for children who received intervention services.

Performance Indicator	Actual 2012	Actual 2013	Actual 2014	Actual 2015	Actual 2016
2.a Children receiving Child Intervention services as a percentage of the child population in Alberta:					
• Percentage	2.2%	2.0%	1.7%	1.6%	1.6%
• Number of children receiving Child Intervention services	18,438	17,264	15,577	14,578	15,321
• Children in Alberta	854,594	872,917	891,452	909,072	929,305

Outcome Three: Greater collaboration between government, communities and Indigenous partners strengthens services and achieves shared social outcomes

Indigenous children are over-represented in all aspects of the child intervention system, which highlights the need for partnership with Indigenous leaders and communities to improve outcomes for Indigenous children and to build on strengths in communities.

Key Strategies:

3.1 Work with Indigenous communities, leaders and partners to strengthen relationships and develop collaborative strategies that support Indigenous people.

3.2 Work closely with Indigenous leaders to review ministry programs and policies to identify ways to implement the objectives and principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

3.3 Improve information-sharing practices within government and with service agencies to support the best outcomes for the health, education and safety of children, youth and families.

3.4 Collaborate with Indigenous communities toward improved service planning and cultural connections for their children.

3.5 Work with Indigenous leaders and the federal government to identify options to formally adopt Jordan's Principle to ensure that meeting the needs of all children, including First Nations children, takes precedence over any jurisdictional issues.

Performance Measure	Last Actual 2015-16	Target 2017-18	Target 2018-19	Target 2019-20
3.a Percentage of Indigenous children in foster care/kinship care who are placed with Indigenous families	40%	50%	53%	53%

Linking Performance Measures to Outcomes:

3.a Demonstrates how the individual needs of vulnerable children may be met by placing them in culturally appropriate situations in collaboration with Indigenous communities in order to achieve shared social outcomes.

RISKS TO ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

Key risks facing Children's Services' ability to achieving outcomes include:

- **Economic climate:** The current downturn in Alberta's economy places additional strain on government resources, potentially limiting necessary investments in services for vulnerable families. It may also cause additional hardships for families already struggling to provide safe and caring homes for children, in turn leading to increased caseloads.
- **Reconciliation:** Children's Services continues with meaningful engagement and ongoing collaboration to strengthen relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Strong and consistent relationships will be required in order to establish trust.
- **Prevention and early intervention:** The crisis nature of many programs and services may direct resources toward addressing immediate service needs rather than prevention and early intervention. The strategic allocation of resources is required to address current issues while maintaining key investments in prevention initiatives, as well as introducing transformative initiatives that could address systemic problems.
- **Integrated services:** The benefits of person-centred, integrated service delivery will be realized most effectively with investment in, and co-ordination of, underlying infrastructure across ministries such as data, business analytics, evaluation mechanisms and strategic workforce planning.

STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS

(thousands of dollars)	Comparable					
	2015-16 Actual	2016-17 Budget	2016-17 Forecast	**2017-18 Estimate**	2018-19 Target	2019-20 Target
REVENUE						
Services to First Nations Reserves	25,289	29,366	29,366	**30,543**	30,543	30,543
Other Federal Transfers	25,516	23,950	23,950	**24,430**	24,430	24,920
Other Revenue	1,971	1,971	1,971	**1,971**	1,971	1,971
Internal Government Transfers	-	-	-	**8,342**	1,125	-
Ministry Total	52,776	55,287	55,287	**65,286**	58,069	57,434
Inter-Ministry Consolidations	-	-	-	**(8,342)**	(1,125)	-
Consolidated Total	52,776	55,287	55,287	**56,944**	56,944	57,434
EXPENSE						
Ministry Support Services	16,625	16,717	16,717	**19,542**	19,492	19,217
Child Intervention	738,495	734,851	762,851	**765,925**	777,074	784,366
Child Care	287,197	306,548	306,548	**321,076**	404,142	416,872
Early Intervention Services for Children and Youth	91,387	91,996	91,996	**102,570**	109,164	111,674
Alberta Child Benefit	-	147,000	125,000	**174,000**	177,000	181,000
Ministry Total	1,133,704	1,297,112	1,303,112	**1,383,113**	1,486,872	1,513,129
Inter-Ministry Consolidations	(8,890)	(10,800)	(10,800)	**(10,800)**	(10,800)	(10,800)
Consolidated Total	1,124,814	1,286,312	1,292,312	**1,372,313**	1,476,072	1,502,329
Net Operating Result	(1,072,038)	(1,231,025)	(1,237,025)	**(1,315,369)**	(1,419,128)	(1,444,895)
CAPITAL INVESTMENT						
Child Intervention	3,216	1,539	1,539	**9,881**	2,664	1,539
Ministry Total	3,216	1,539	1,539	**9,881**	2,664	1,539
Inter-Ministry Consolidations	-	-	-	**(8,342)**	(1,125)	-
Consolidated Total	3,216	1,539	1,539	**1,539**	1,539	1,539